

THE GREAT BATH: A PLACE OF SACRED RITUAL BATH OR A 'TEMPLE' IN ITSELF!

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ABSTRACT

The historians as well as the researchers have come up with numerous theories for the religious belief of the Indus Valley people. Few historians claim Hinduism as their religion which is based on the evidence of Pashupati seal. For few, the Indus Valley people were atheists. Many of them ended up with the tag of nature worship. Still, the religious structure (if any) is obscure. I too agree with the nature worship concept. I have moved a step further in the lines of nature worship only, with one natural element as the object of worship. As per my research nature worship was prevalent among the Indus Valley people. The sun, air, earth and fire were not channelized till then. Water was the only natural element which was channelized, thus, worshipped. The Great Bath is the living testimony of the same.

KEYWORDS: Nature worship, Water, Great Bath, Rig Veda

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INTRODUCTION

MAIN BODY

The religion of the Indus Valley Civilization is a debated topic and still remains a matter of speculation. If the Indus script is ever deciphered, this may provide clearer evidence for the religious beliefs. The first excavators of the Indus valley civilisation were struck by the absence of obvious religious structures or other evidence of religious worship. There remain no evidence of religious buildings generally agreed by scholars to have had a religious function, although some suggestions of religious use have been made. The belief system of the Indus Valley people has received considerable attention, with many writers concerned with identifying precursors to the religious practices and deities of much later Indian religions. However, due to the scarcity of evidence, the belief system is open to varying interpretations. The fact is that the Indus script remains undeciphered to date and the religious beliefs continues to be obscure. The conclusions are partly speculative and many are largely based on a retrospective view from the Aryan religious practices.

However, based on the excavations some historians believe Mother Goddess i.e. God of Earth and Pashupati Mahadeva, as religious deities. Many seals were discovered with the picture of a lady and trees growing from her embryo. This was identified by historians as God of Earth or God of fertility or Mother Goddess. The interpretation of Lord Pashupati Mahadeva is based on the Pashupati seal which reflects the image of a yogi in mediation posture with two horns on the crown.

The predecessors of the Indus Valley people, the Aryans were highly religious and practised nature worship. They were impressed by the forces of nature such as the Sun, the Fire, the Wind, the Dawn, the Water, the Rain God, Indra and Earth whom they worshipped as gods. Every natural phenomenon was regarded as an act of

God, which they worshipped and prayed for their own prosperity. Varuna and Indra were their chief Gods. Varuna was their chief God who knew all the mysteries of the universe. In the Rig-Veda there are several hymns seeking his forgiveness for one's sins as is evident from the following hymn:

'O Varuna deliver us from the sin of our fore-fathers. Deliver us from our own sins'.

God Indra was worshipped so that he may protect his devotees from the holocaust of wars and fill their granaries by sending timely rains. Most of the hymns in the Rig-Veda praise this god. One of the hymns says:

'O Indra with your help, we will slay our foes.'

This type of worship is known as nature worship. Nature worship is a system of religion based on the veneration of natural phenomena—for example, celestial objects such as the sun and moon and terrestrial objects such as water and fire. At that time all elements of nature were worshipped, Agni (god of fire), Indra (God of rain and thunder), Pawan (God of wind), Prithvi (God of the earth), Varuna (god of water), Surya (the sun god), Chandra (the moon god). However, Varuna, the god of water dominated all and was given utmost priority.

OBSERVATION

As per my research, there was a transition phase of 100-200 years only between the Indus Valley and the Aryan age. It is hard to believe that the Indus Valley people who were technically and scientifically advanced (visible by their town planning and drainage system), may not have practiced any religious belief.

Some scholars, deriving from Marshall, propose the Great Bath of Mohenjo-daro to be a forerunner of ritual bathing which is central to the religious structure of Hinduism. Thus, the hunt for religious structures near the Great Bath is still going on. On the other hand, Doniger rejects the hypotheses. To her, the Great Bath only depicts that the Harappans had a propensity to be convincing. However, I do not support this theory given by Marshall. Possehl finds Marshall's theory of a ritual purpose. According to my research, the Great Bath was not a place for ritual bathing. Instead, it was a place of worshipping Water for their prosperity and well-being. "Water" was in fact the deity or the object of worship. The Great Bath was not a place of ritual bathing but a religious structure.

Thus, during my research on Indus Valley Civilisation and its religion, I came to the hypothesis that instead of idols and deities the people of Indus Valley Civilisation worshipped "Water". My research gives stress on my point that, "The Great bath was not the place of sacred bathing but rather was a religious structure". The reason that no evidence of religious structures has been found is because historians were looking for religious structures. The identification of the Great bath was based on the Vedic ritual of bathing beside the temple worship. The contemporary civilisations across the world were worshipping different elements of nature. The examples of these are as follows:

- **Mesopotamian Civilisation**
 - Anu (god of sky)
 - Enlil (god of earth)
- **Egyptian Civilisation**
 - Khepri (morning form of sun god)

- Atum (old, evening form of sun god)
- Shu (god of air and sky)
- Geb (god of earth)
- **Chinese Civilisation**
 - Chang'e (goddess of moon)
- **Roman/Greek Civilisation**
 - Zeus (god of sky, thunder and lightning)
 - Poseidon (god of sea)
 - Apollo (god of sun)
 - Vulcan (god of fire)

The evidence of Nature worship was first found in the Rig Veda which was exactly after the Indus valley civilisation. As per the historical records, the Aryans dominated in the landscape of the northern Indian subcontinent. It is also true that the indigenous Indians with their own customs and traditions got mixed up with the new Aryan race. It is quite possible that the traditions of Indus Valley people were passed on to the early Aryans as the geographical location and the era was the same. This can be observed today as our traditions are passed from ages to ages by our ancestors and predecessors. The religious beliefs and structure changed from nature worship to idol worship when the caste system changed from social division based on occupation to social division based on birth. The ruling class and the priestly class introduced to the society, the divine theory, which says that the king is the incarnation of God on Earth and the priest is the representative of God on Earth. The priestly class was able to maintain its supremacy in the social structure of the Later Vedic age. This assured them their grandeur in society. Moreover, whatever is written in the Rig Veda is the knowledge of Indian Rishis and Munis that has been passed on to them by their ancestors. It was during the Early Vedic Age that the Vedas were compiled, earlier it was passed down orally. Thus, I believe that the practice of nature worship has also been passed by the people of Indus Valley Civilisation.

Moreover, the worship of trees is already been proven by scholars. A seal of a deity amidst branches of peepal tree has been found and trees continue to be worshipped to this day. Even animals were worshipped, the evidence of which is found on the Pashupati seal. Thus the practice of nature worship and belief in the natural phenomenon is quite evident.

Today also we find the tribals worshipping only nature. The tribal nature worship of today is in fact the religious practice which our ancestors followed. Nature is all around us, sun, tree, water, thunder, soil, etc. Many of our ancestral practices still exist in their crude form and some got diminished with time. The 'Chatt Puja' is one of the best examples of nature worship. This puja which comes on the sixth day of Deepawali is famous in Bihar and Bengal regions. Thanks to the vote bank politics that it is now popular and celebrated throughout north India. Interestingly, no idol is worshipped but the sun and the water are worshipped. I tried to search for content and information about Chatt Puja and its history but landed nowhere. This only proves that this worship of sun and water was passed on from generation to generation without being written with rules.

CONCLUSIONS

In the conclusion of my research, I can say that the elements of nature were part of the religious beliefs and practices of the Indus Valley people. Out of all the elements of nature, water played a major role in the progress of civilisation. Indus Valley civilisation was located along the Indus River and its tributaries. This means that the people were completely dependent on water for their living and existence. As a common man, we worship the reason behind which we believe lays our existence. At the time they existed because of water because water was used in agriculture, strong town construction, trade and even exploitation of natural resources. In the absence of any scientific explanation, every natural phenomenon was considered an act of god. To survive and prevent such situations, they worshipped water to stay calm and always flowing. In either of the cases, flood and drought, their livelihood would be destroyed. Thus, as per my research nature worship was prevalent among the Indus Valley people. The sun, air, earth and fire were not channelized till then. Water was the only natural element which was channelized, thus, worshipped. The Great Bath is the living testimony of the same.

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